# Florida's First Magnitude Springs

Partnerships & Regional Incentives

Bay, Citrus, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Hernando, Jackson, Lafayette, Leon, Levy, Madison, Marion, Suwannee, Wakulla, Walton, Washington

Year Added to Priority List	1991
Project Acres	16,965
Acquired Acres	10,926
Cost of Acquired Acres	\$91,794,252
Remaining Project Acres	6,040
2020 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres	\$31,928,340

# Purpose for State Acquisition

The Florida's First Magnitude Springs project will protect large springs of clear, continuously flowing water that are among Florida's most famous and important natural and recreational resources. The cavernous, water-filled rock of the Floridan Aquifer supplies the largest springs. By preserving land around the springs, this project will aid in the protection of springs, karst windows, and the Floridan Aquifer from the effects of commercial, residential, and agricultural runoff; clearcutting and mining; and unsupervised recreation. This project will ensure that Floridians and visitors from all over the world will be able to enjoy Florida springs for years to come.

# **General Description**

The tick, water-filled limestone underlying the state of Florida has created more large springs (including river rises and karst windows) than any other state or even country. Those discharging an average of 100 cubic feet of water per second, or more, are called first-magnitude springs. The 33 recognized first-magnitude springs in Florida are scattered in the northern peninsula and the eastern panhandle, where the limestone of the Floridan Aquifer arches close to the surface. Each day, these 33 springs send out much more water than is used for drinking water by all the people in the state. The springs, with generally clear, continuously flowing waters, are among Florida's most important natural resources and are famous tourist attractions. The tracts harbor at least seven FNAI-listed plants and eighteen FNAI-listed animals. The Weeki Wachee tract includes one of the best remaining scrubs on Florida's West Coast.

Several archaeological or historic sites are known from these springs, from remains over 2000 years old to an historic Sinclair gas station. All these springs are vulnerable to development and unsupervised use.

# FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

FNAI Elements	Score
Reticulated flatwoods salamander	G2/S1
Florida manatee	G2G3T2/S2S3
Gopher tortoise	G3/S3
Florida mouse	G3/S3
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Suwannee moccasinshell	G1/S1
Withlacoochee tiny sand-loving scarab	G1/S1
Woodville karst cave crayfish	G1/S1
ciliate-leaf tickseed	G1G2/S1
Jackson County cave amphipod	G1G2/S1
Dougherty Plain cave amphipod	G1G2/S1
Gulf moccasinshell	G2/S1

# **Public Use**

The project sites are designated for use as state parks, geological sites and WEAs, with high recreational potential for swimming, canoeing, camping, and nature appreciation.

# **Acquisition Planning**

# 1990

On December 7, 1990, the LAAC added the Florida's First Magnitude Springs – Phase I project to the CARL Priority list. This fee-simple acquisition, sponsored by the Department of Environmental Regulations, consisted of approximately 2,907 acres, 36 landowners, 136 parcels, and a taxable value (TAV) of \$5,718,493.

In 1990, five springs made up the project:

- 1) Falmouth Spring (Suwannee County, 75 acres, 1 parcel, 1 landowner, TAV \$45,000),
- 2) Fanning Springs (Levy County, 525 acres, 98 parcels, 17 landowners, TAV \$1,187,610),
- 3) Gainer Springs (Bay County, 1,258 acres, 19 parcels, 7 landowners, TAV \$3,256,739),
- 4) River Sink Spring (Wakulla County, 105 acres, 4 parcels, 4 landowners, TAV \$64,956), and
- 5) St. Marks Springs (Leon County, 890 acres, 19 parcels, 6 landowners, TAV \$1,164,188).

According to the 1990 Project Design document, DRP will manage St. Marks Springs. USFS will manage River Sink Spring. OGT, DRP, and SRWMD will manage Fanning Springs. A lead manager has not been determined for Falmouth Springs. The lead manager is still unclear for Gainer Springs; however, NWFWMD and Bay County both expressed an interest. A portion of the Fanning Springs sites have been acquired. NWFWMD has acquired 214 acres of the Gainer Springs sites.

#### 1991

On June 28, 1991, the LAAC approved a 218-acre addition to the Falmouth Springs site, located in Suwannee County, within the project boundary. It was sponsored by the landowner, Nemours



Foundation, who already has acreage within the current boundary and is not willing to sell only a portion of the tract. The taxable value of the addition is \$129,600. SRWMD will manage if acquired.

#### 1992

On December 10, 1992, the LAAC approved Phase II that added three springs, 1,880 acres with a taxable value of \$5,180,452. This addition consisted of Jackson Blue Springs (Jackson County, 348 acres, 3 parcels, 2 landowners, TAV \$256,556); Troy Spring (Lafayette County, 265 acres, 6 parcels, 2 landowners, TAV \$261,897); and Weeki Wachee Springs (Hernando County, 1,267 acres, 59 parcels, 24 landowners, TAV \$4,661,999). FWC will manage the Weeki Wachee Springs sites. DRP will manage the Troy Spring site. Jackson County will manage the Jackson Blue Springs sites. Portions of Troy Spring, Weeki Wachee Springs, and Jackson Blue Springs sites have been acquired.

On December 10, 1992, the LAAC also approved a fee-simple, 1,635-acre addition (Gainer Springs Expansion) and combined it with the Gainer Springs site. Most of the addition is owned by Hunt Petroleum/Rosewood Timber Co. and St. Joe Paper. There are also several small ownerships. The estimated taxable value is \$3,000,000. Phase I was combined with the new Florida's First Magnitude Springs Phase II. The springs are in Bay and Washington counties. NWFWMD will manage the 214-acre Harder tract that it acquired.

#### 1995

On October 30, 1995, the LAAC approved a fee-simple, 20-acre addition (Jackson Blue Springs) to the project boundary in Jackson County. It was sponsored by the two landowners, Carolyn D. Huff and Wayne Mixon, located along Spring Run of Merritt's Mill Pond in Jackson County, and has a taxable value of \$258,790. Jackson County will manage. Both properties were acquired in 1997.

## 1998

On December 3, 1998, the LAMAC transferred the St. Marks Springs, River Sink Spring, Fanning Springs, and Gainer Springs sites to the Negotiation Impasse group. On July 29, 1999, the LAMAC approved a feesimple, 65-acre addition (Madison Blue Springs) in Madison County to the project, sponsored by the landowners' representative. It contains 45 parcels, 22 landowners, and a taxable value of \$604,000. The addition was designated essential and added to the Priority portion of the project. Madison County will manage it. Approximately 44 acres have been acquired.

## 2000

On August 22, 2000, the ARC approved a fee-simple, 40-acre addition (Cypress Spring) in Washington County to the project boundary. The addition was sponsored by Conservation Properties for the landowner, Harold Vickers, and had a taxable value of \$131,400. Mr. Vickers was willing to manage it if acquired; however, property was sold to a third party in 2002.

# 2003

On April 18, 2003, the ARC approved a fee-simple, 200-acre addition (Morrison Springs) in Walton County to the project boundary with a taxable value of \$63,880. The addition was sponsored by Conservation Properties, Inc. and Walton County will manage the site. Also, on April 18, 2003 ARC



approved a fee-simple, 4,552-acre addition (Silver Springs Addition) north of Silver Springs in Marion County to the project boundary. The addition was sponsored by the Silver Springs Basin Working Group, consisted of one landowner, Avatar Properties Inc., and had a taxable value of \$3,406,945. FFS will manage this if it is acquired.

On August 15, 2003, the ARC approved a fee-simple, 172-acre addition (Lafayette Blue Springs) in Lafayette County to the project boundary. The addition was sponsored by Conservation Properties, consisted of one landowner, Union Land and Timber Corp., 9 parcels, and a taxable value of \$97,000. Lafayette County will manage if acquired. On October 17, 2003, the ARC approved a fee-simple, 365-acre addition (Silver Springs Addition No. 2) in Marion County to the project boundary. The addition was sponsored by the Silver Springs Basin Working Group and the Marion County Audubon, Inc., consisted of one landowner, Seldin, 2 parcels, and a taxable value of \$2,889,223. Marion County will manage the site. In 2005, 330 acres were acquired.

On December 5, 2003, the ARC approved a fee- simple, 1,717-acre addition (Jackson Blue Springs) in Jackson County to the project boundary. The addition, sponsored by Conservation Properties, consisted of 11 parcels, 5 landowners (Edinburgh Investment Corp; AJ Green; Howard Muncaster Partnership; LH Alford Farms Inc.; Doyle Green), and a taxable value of \$303,367. Jackson County will manage it if acquired. On October 15, 2004, the ARC approved a fee-simple, 5-acre addition (Church Sink) in Leon County to the project boundary. The addition was sponsored by the landowner, J. Lee Vause Trust, consisted of one parcel, and a taxable value of \$47,700. Leon County will manage if acquired.

#### 2006

On October 13, 2006, the ARC approved a fee-simple 305-acre addition (Hardee Spring) to the boundary in Hamilton County. The addition was sponsored by Harold Hardee and involved one parcel with a taxable value of \$57,001. FFS would manage the site as part of the Twin Rivers State Forest if acquired. In July 2007, the BOT acquired 4,471 acres of the Avatar property in Marion County.

# 2009

On February 25, 2009, the BOT acquired 54.74 acres from the Rakestraw family in the St. Marks Site.

## 2010

On January 6, 2010, FFS purchased approximately 1 acre for \$16,065 from Kaiser/TNC in the Indian Lake State Forest. On May 11, 2010, FFS purchased 0.12 acres for \$2,550. FFS will manage both purchases. In July 2010, FFS purchased two parcels (0.23 for \$5,100 and 0.12 for \$2,800) and will manage both. On November 15, 2011, FFS purchased to manage .23 acres in Indian Lake State Forest (Potter-\$5,100).

In October 2010, FFS purchased 5 parcels (Silver Spring Addition--Bloom, Dinkins, Dupras, Hanson, Szymialis ownerships) making 1/2 acre for a combined \$10,200 and will manage all. In November 2010 FFS purchased 2 parcels (Silver Spring Addition--Stovall, Landry) or .29 acre for \$6,375 and will manage these.



#### 2011

On May 2, 2011, FFS purchased and will manage .23 acre (Jean and Giselle Raymond-\$12,000). On August 3, 2011, the Felburn Foundation donated 2.42 acres in Silver Springs (valued at \$100,000) for FFS to manage. On September 16, 2011, DRP purchased to manage 55.73 acres (Gerrell Plantation, Inc.-\$457,000), as an addition to Natural Bridge Historic State Park. On December 9, 2011, this project was placed in the Partnerships and Regional Incentives category of Florida Forever projects.

#### 2013

On February 15, 2013 the ARC changed the design of the Florida's First Magnitude Springs project in Madison County to add the 608-acre Damascus Peanut Tract, then found that conveying the tract to the Suwannee River Water Management District in exchange for the District's 670-acre Ellaville tract would make a greater conservation value and that the Damascus Peanut Tract was no longer needed for conservation by the BOT.

#### 2014

In April 2014, the ARC agreed to add the 360-acre Brunson Landing Tract on Holmes Creek, north of Vernon, to the project boundary to protect water resources from development. It provides over 2,200 feet of frontage along Homes Creek and is adjacent to NWFWMD land. It would also be managed by NWFWMD if acquired.

#### 2015

On June 19, 2015, the ARC voted to add the 405-acre Blue Springs Park on the Santa Fe River in Gilchrist County to the Florida's First Magnitude Springs. The park has a just value of \$1,361,547 and has a second-magnitude spring and two smaller springs. Blue Springs was then added by the ARC to the boundary of the existing Florida's First Magnitude Springs project. On April 20, 2012 the ARC added 63.4 acres to the project that had been authorized for sale from the US Forest Service.

The 470-acre Silver Springs Sandhill on the edge of Ocala was proposed for fee-simple acquisition, considered, and approved by the ARC as a stand-alone project on June 19, 2015. It was then immediately added by the ARC to the boundary of the existing Florida First Magnitude Springs project.

## 2017

On October 2, 2017, the state purchased 465 acres of the Sandhill tract to be managed by Marion County as part of the Coehadjoe Park.

On October 6, 2017, DEP closed on 399 acres of Blue Springs Park in Gilchrist County.

In October 2017, the ARC approved the Springs Coast Research Station as a Florida Forever project. The project had an estimated tax value of \$643,154. This 28-acre parcel in southwest Citrus County is north of the town of Chassahowitzka. It shares northern and western boundaries with the Chassahowitzka River and Coastal Swamps (managed by SFWMD). The parcel is at the edge of Crab Creek, which is the site of Crab Spring, part of the Chassahowitzka first magnitude spring group. The facilities on the property have been well maintained, and the campus layout and functions of the residence and satellite buildings would make it suitable as a research center for springs systems and habitats. The project was



proposed by Wildlands Conservation, a nonprofit conservation group based in Tampa, who would manage the property as a springs research campus in coordination with several educational institutions, as well as protecting the surrounding public lands and underwater acreage. In December 2017, the ARC voted to add the 28-acre Springs Coast Research Station Florida Forever project boundary to that of the Florida's First Magnitude Springs project.

In calendar year 2017, a total of 863.45 acres in this project were acquired using Florida Forever program funding.

#### 2018

On June 15, 2018, the ARC members voted to add 556 acres in Columbia County to the project. This is the Santa Fe Springs Tract, on the north side of the Santa Fe River. FFS will manage this site through the FFS's Suwannee Forestry Center if acquired, however it may be managed as a standalone Forest property. FFS estimates the budget needs for the one year of interim management to require a total of \$167,974 from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (1 fulltime employee at \$44,439, Expenses of \$71,935, and Operating Capital Outlay of \$167,974).

#### 2020

On October 9, 2020, the ARC approved the addition of 37.6-acres that includes Mud Spring in Hernando County to the project boundary.

# **Coordination**

Hernando County has limited acquisition funds but is very supportive of state acquisition efforts. NWFWMD has acquired the 214-acre Harder tract in Gainer Springs.

#### Management Policy Statement

The primary goals of management of the Florida's First Magnitude Springs project are to preserve land around springs, karst windows, and springs to aid in the protection of the Floridan Aquifer from the effects of commercial, residential, and agricultural runoff; clearcutting and mining; and unsupervised recreation.

# Manager(s)

Mud Spring (Hernando County) Jackson Blue Springs (Jackson County), Church Sink (Leon County), Silver Springs Sandhill (Marion County) Morrison Spring (Walton County), Blue Springs Park, St. Marks Springs, Madison Blue Springs, Troy Spring, Lafayette Blue Springs Weeki Wachee Springs, Horn Spring (DRP), Hardee Spring (FFS), River Sink Spring (US Forest Service) Brunson Landing and Cypress Spring (Leased from owner, managed by NWFWMD) Damascus Peanut Tract and Falmouth Spring (NWFWMD), Gainer Springs, Fanning Springs (DRP/NWFWMD), Springs Coast Research (Wildlands Conservation).

# **Management Prospectus**

# Qualifications for state designation

Blue Spring has the diversity of resources and recreational opportunities to qualify as a state park. The location of the Weeki Wachee project adjacent to the Chassahowitzka WEA, as well as its sensitive



natural resources, qualifies it as a WEA. River Sink spring is a first- magnitude karst window. This qualified it as a state geological site. St. Marks, Fanning, Troy, Falmouth, and Gainer Springs have the diversity of resources and recreational opportunities to qualify as a state park.

# **Conditions affecting intensity of management**

River Sink and Blue Spring are moderate-need tracts, requiring more than basic resource management and protection. Gainer Springs is a high-need management area including public recreational use and development compatible with resource management. FFS would manage the Santa Fe Spring parcel for Operation Outdoor Freedom Hunts.

## Management implementation, Public access, Site security and Protection of infrastructure

Jackson County Blue Spring is now being used by the public and Jackson County has no plans to curtail activities. The County would continue to open the swim area in season and maintain year-round access for boating, fishing, and nature appreciation. The smaller second spring may need restrictions to ensure public safety and preservation of the limestone bluffs. A lifeguard will be on duty while the swim area is open. Access will be controlled primarily by fences. River Sink would immediately fall under the National Forests in Florida's Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). Within the first few years after acquisition, management activities would focus on site security, resource inventory, removal of existing trash, and any necessary prescribed fire management. In the first year after Gainer Springs is acquired, the Division of Recreation and Parks will concentrate on site security, natural and cultural resource protection, and the development of a plan for long-term public use and resource management.

## Revenue-generating potential

The Blue Springs swim area generated \$21,946 in revenue in fiscal year 1992-1993 and \$13,045 in fiscal year 1993-94. DRP expects Gainer Springs to generate no significant revenue initially. The amount of any revenue generated would depend on the nature and extent of public use and facilities. As facilities are developed, River Sink may become a national recreational fee area. Fees collected from use of this area would be activities of the Federal Government. It is estimated that the area will receive more than 5,000 visits annually once it is developed.

## **Cooperators in management activities**

Jackson County expects FWC to cooperate in managing wildlife on the Blue Spring project area. Other appropriate agencies may wish to become involved in the project. As funds become available and subject to public approval, the USFS may enter into a cooperative agreement to manage the property.

Management Cost Summary

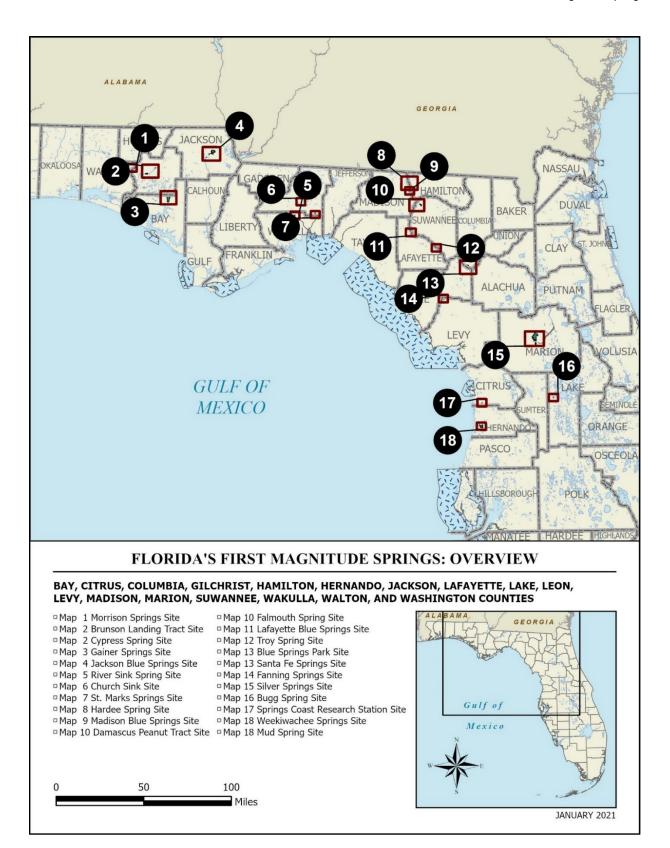
DRP	Startup	Recurring	Startup	Recurring
Source of Funds	Federal	Federal	CARL	CARL
Salary	\$0	\$5,000	\$22,167	\$22,167
OPS	\$0	\$0	\$7,280	\$7,280
Expense	\$3,000	\$5,000	\$5,424	\$5,424



OCO	\$0	\$0	\$6,978	\$6,978
FCO	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
TOTAL	\$3,000	\$10,000	\$41,849	\$41,849

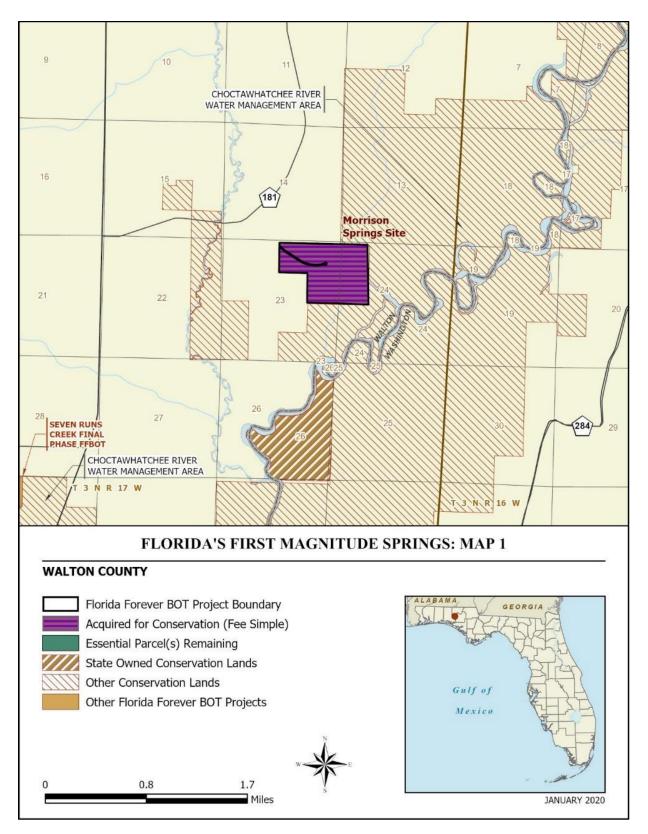
Source: Management Prospectus as originally submitted





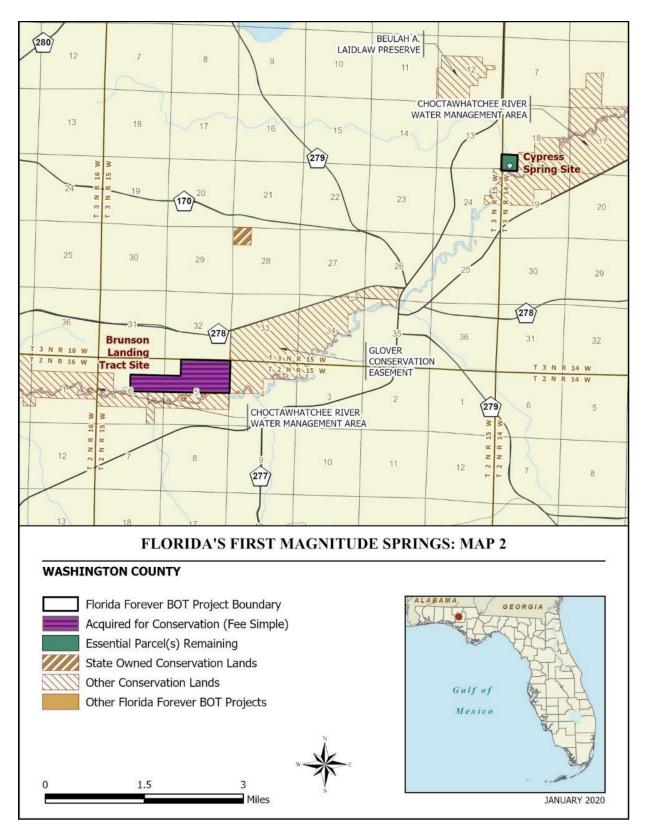
Map 1: FNAI, January 2021





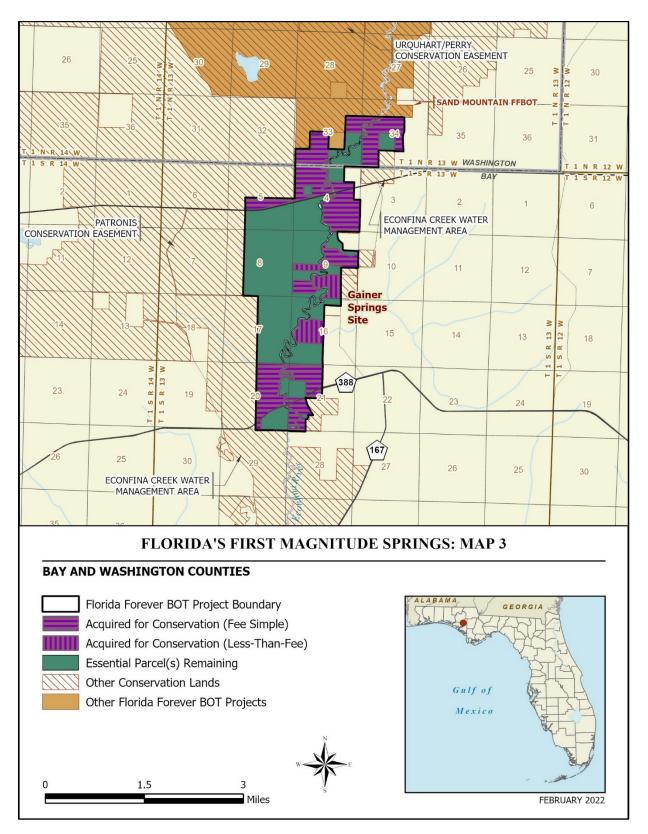
Map 2: FNAI, January 2020





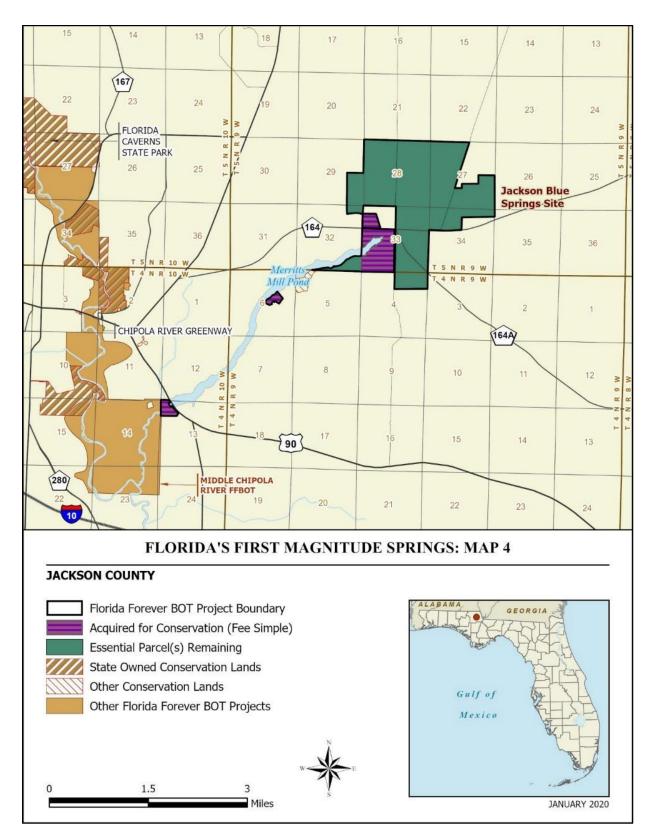
Map 3: FNAI, January 2020





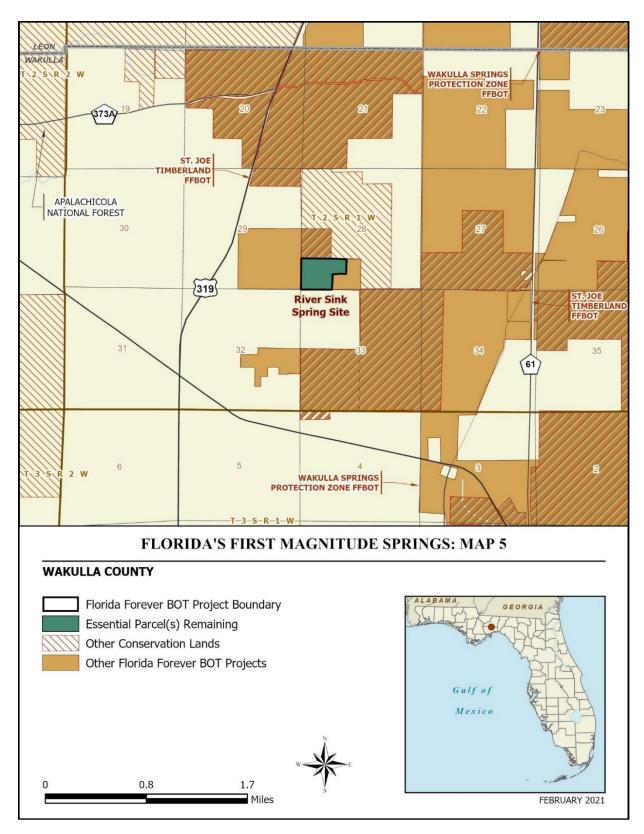
Map 4: FNAI, February 2022





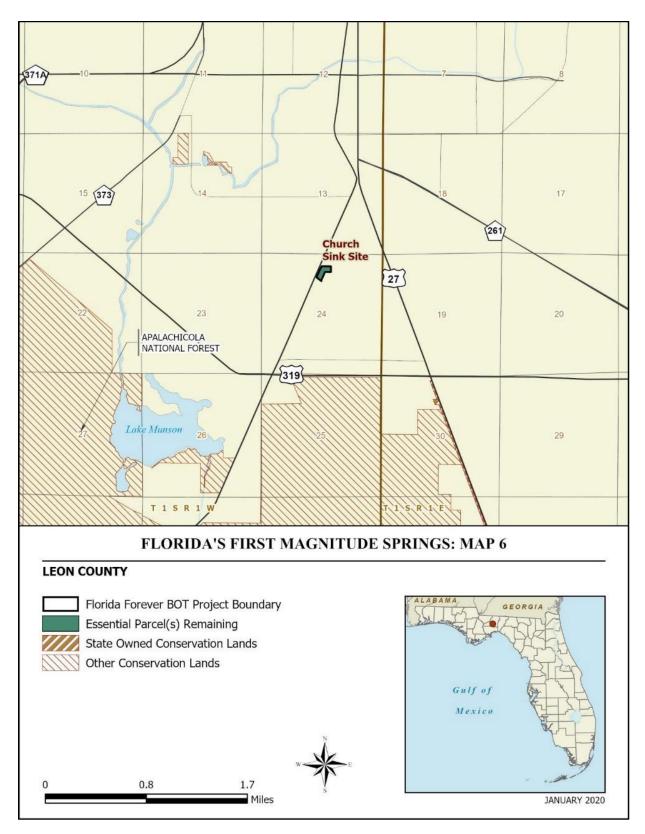
Map 5: FNAI, January 2020





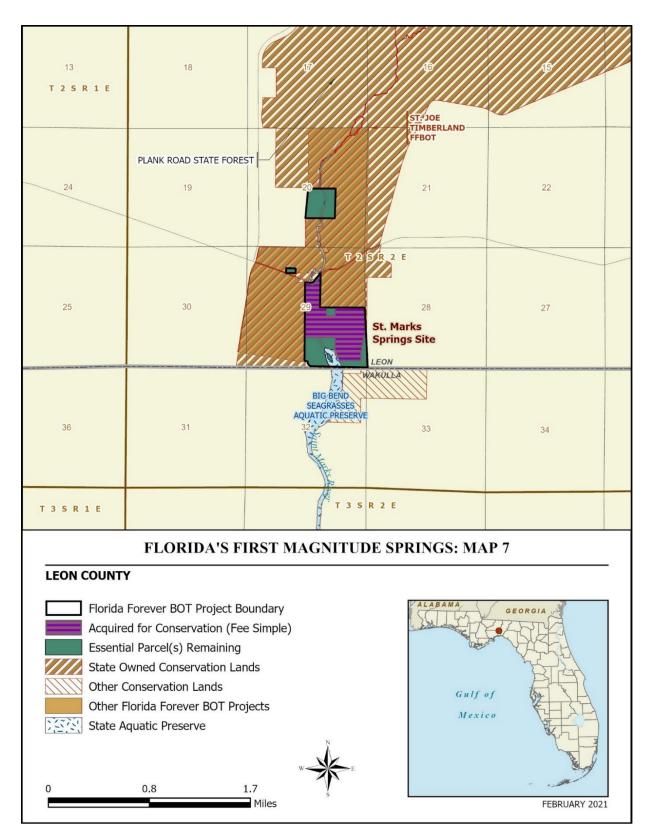
Map 6: FNAI, February 2021





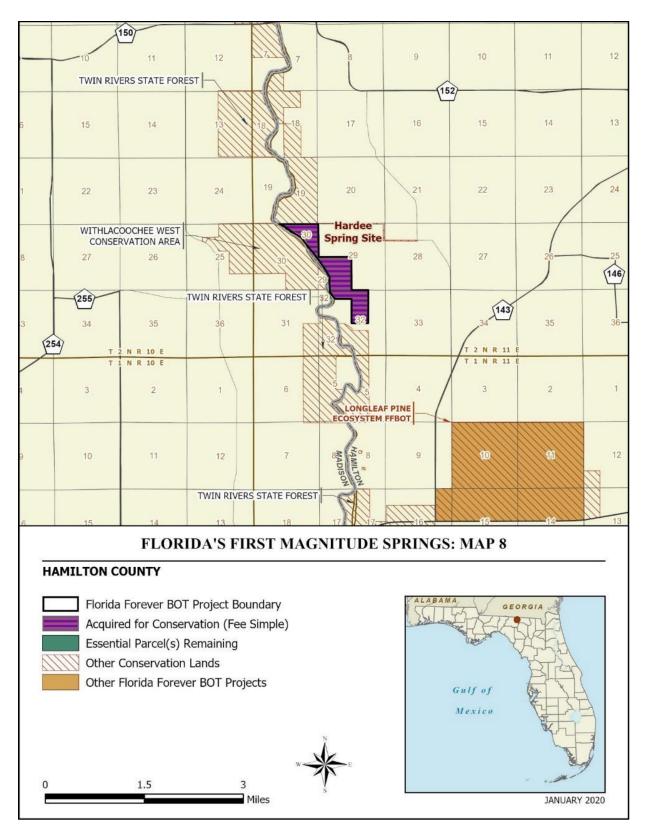
Map 7: FNAI, January 2020





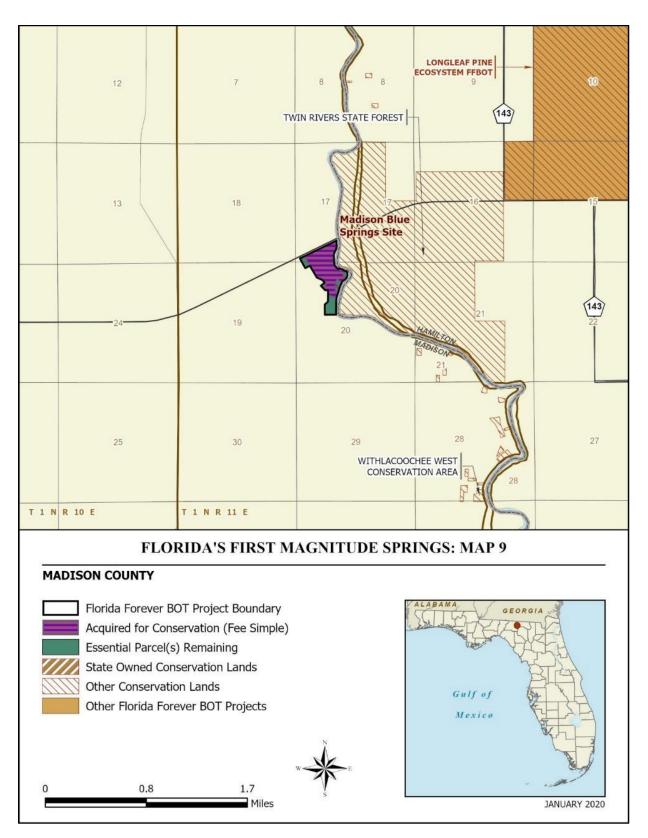
Map 8: FNAI, February 2021





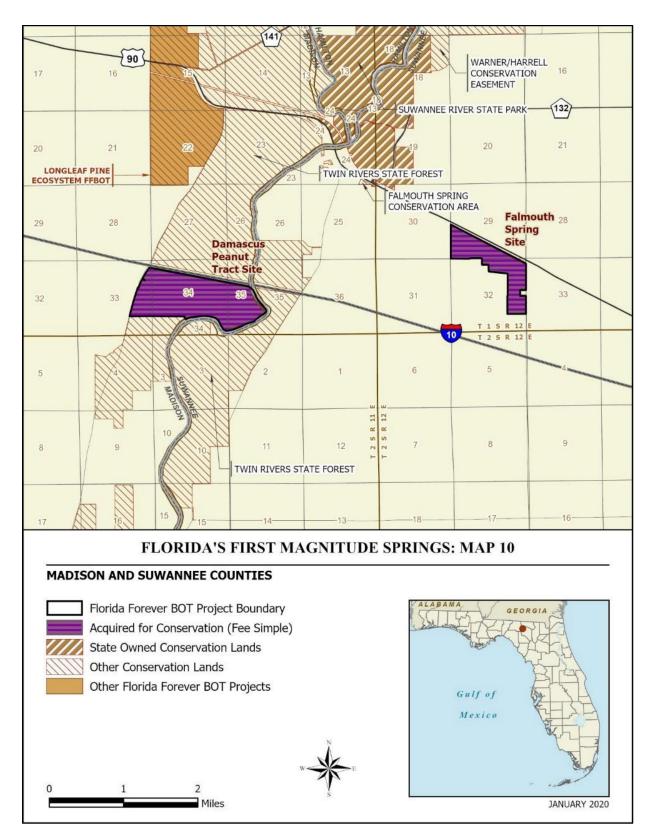
Map 9: FNAI, January 2020





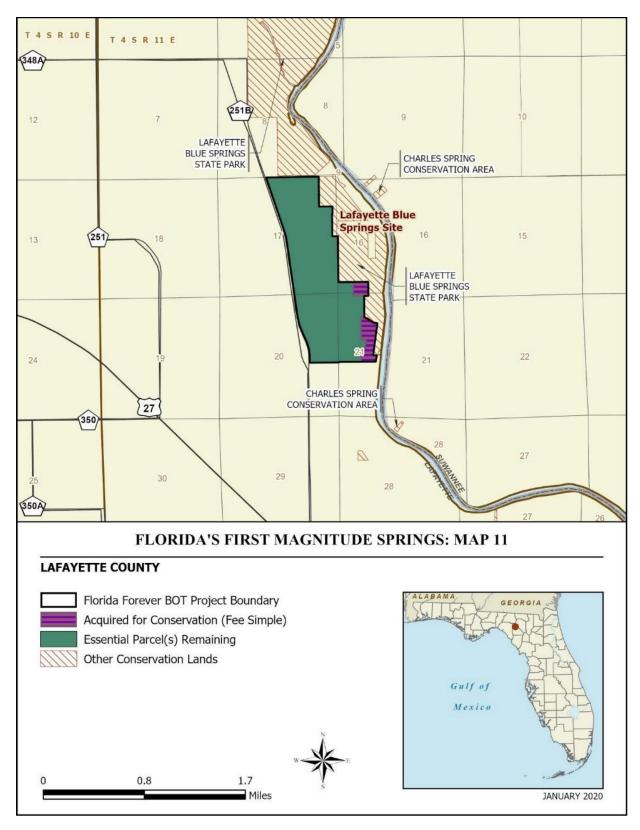
Map 10: FNAI, January 2020





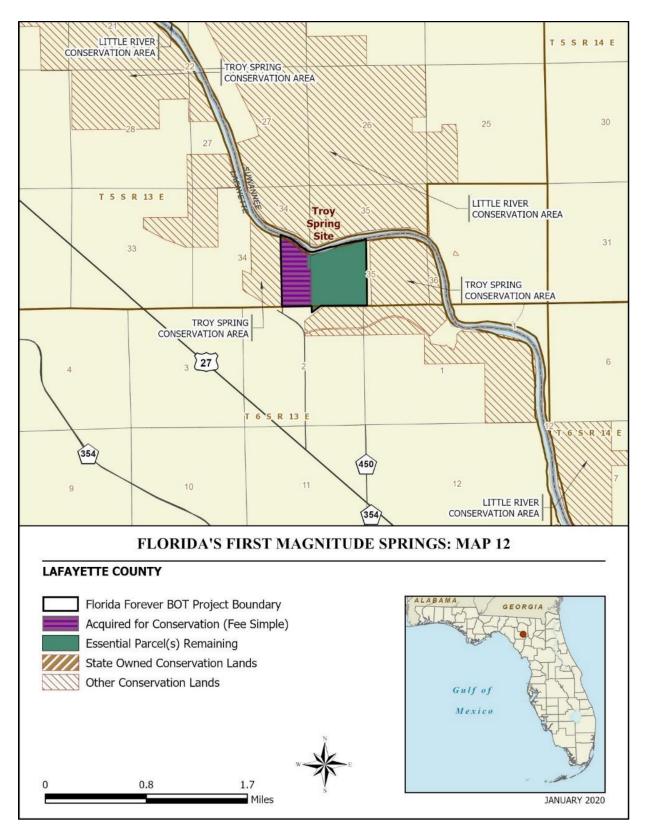
Map 11: FNAI, January 2020





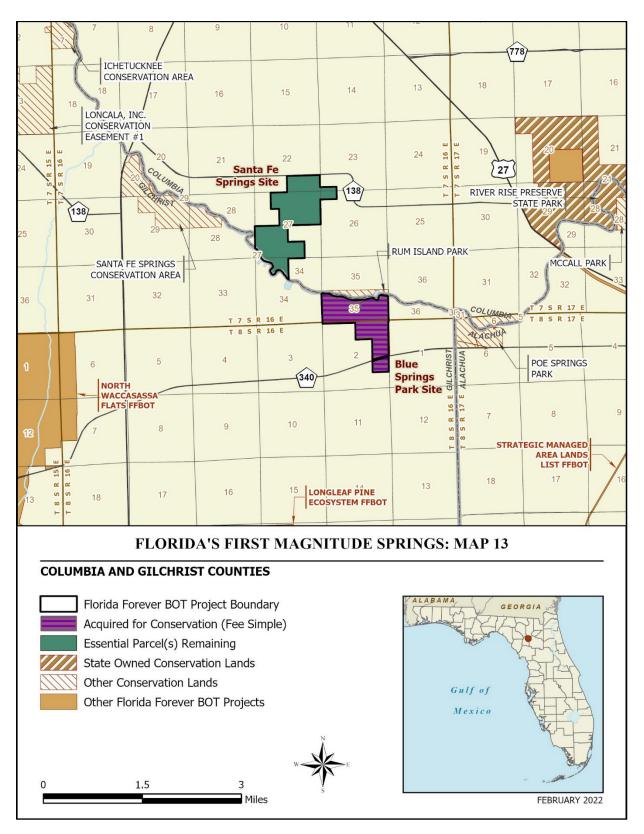
Map 12: FNAI, January 2020





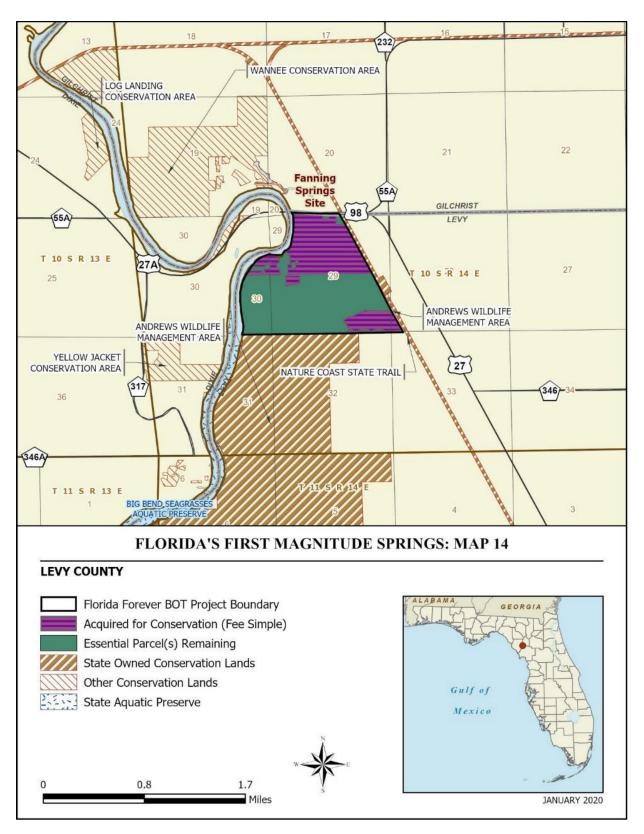
Map 13: FNAI, January 2020





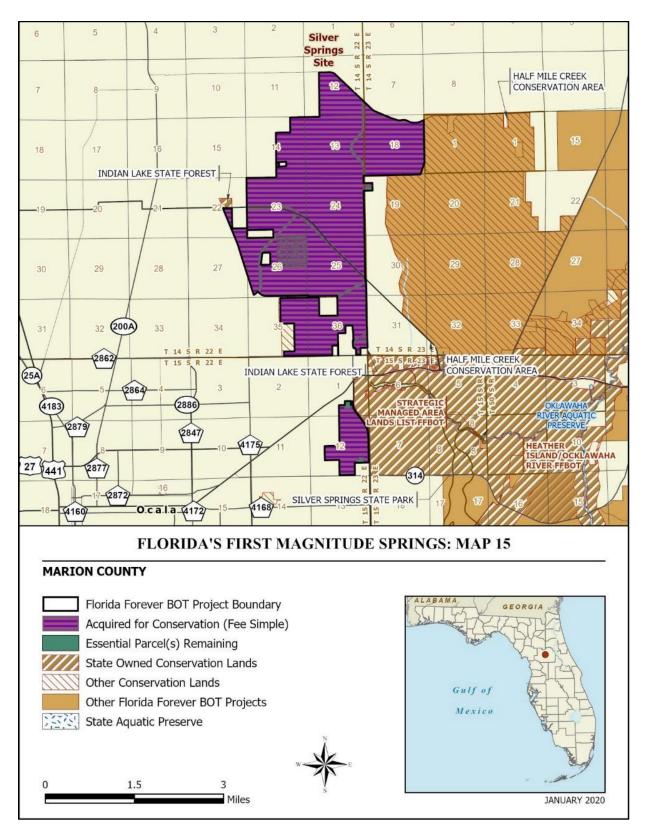
Map 14: FNAI, February 2022





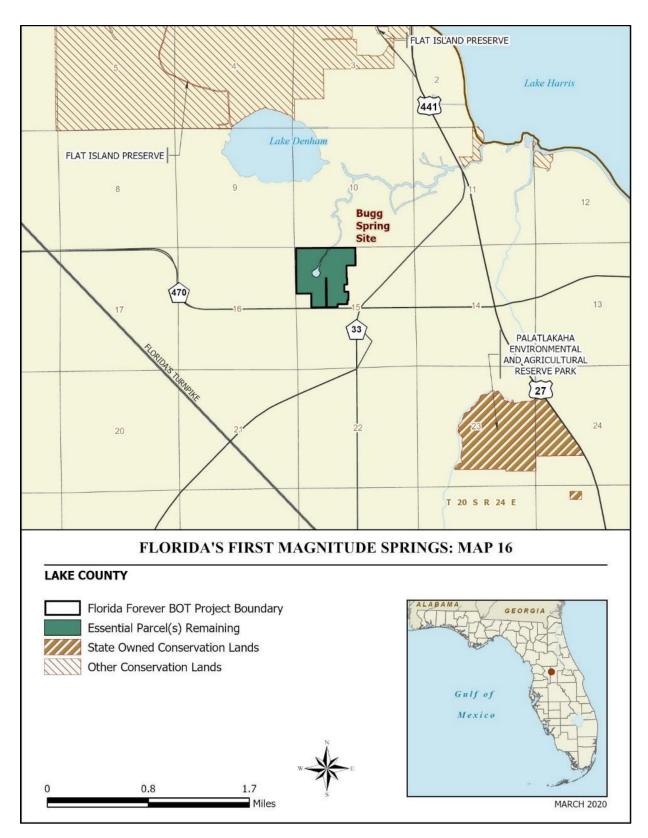
Map 15: FNAI, January 2020





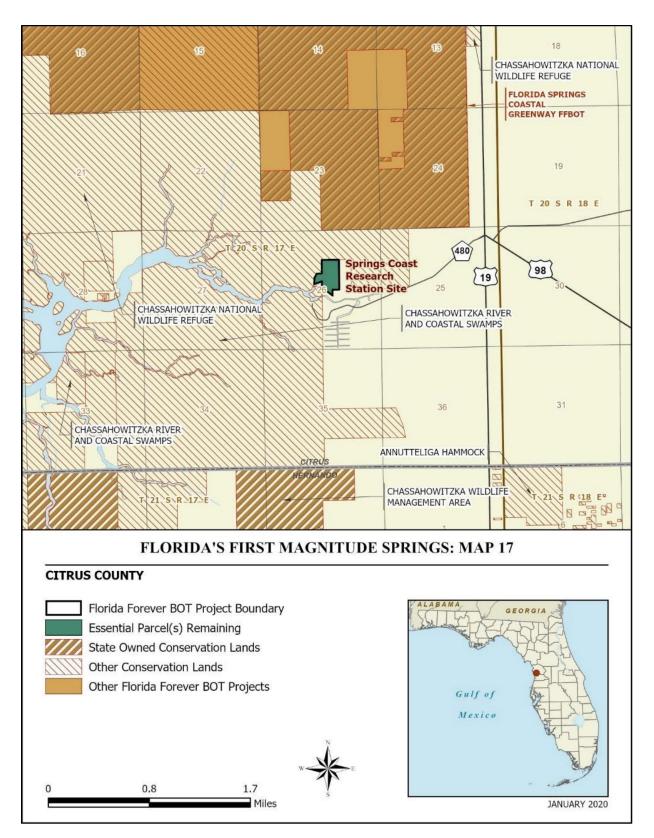
Map 16: FNAI, January 2020





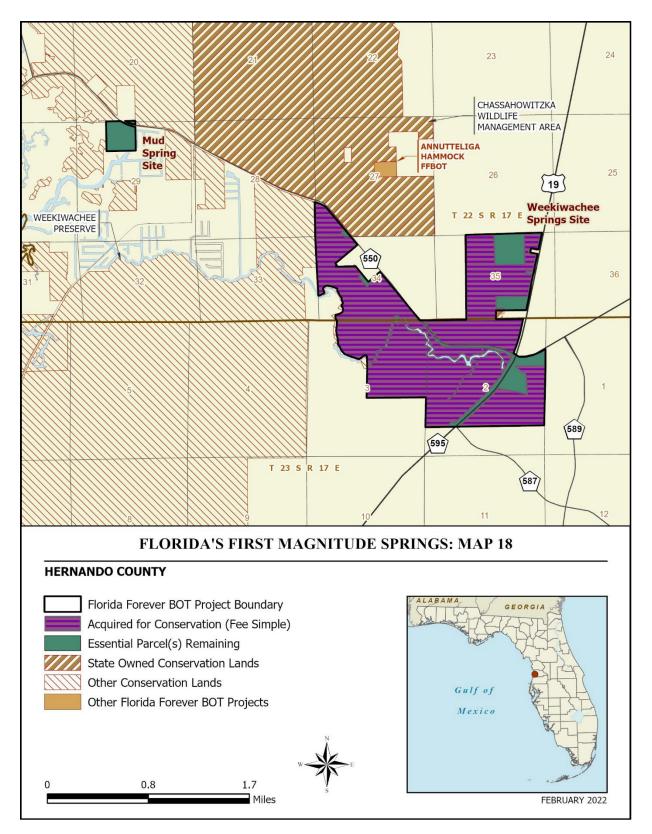
Map 17: FNAI, March 2020





Map 18: FNAI, January 2020





Map 19: FNAI, February 2022

